

Plays That Read As Well As They Act

Maeterlinck Play of Mysterious Origin

A NEW and compact little volume of the Modern Library contains standard translations of five of Maeterlinck's typical plays; the sixth, a literary curiosity, would alone make the book worth having.

A *Miracle of Saint Antony* is something of a mystery. Of the innumerable books and hundreds of articles written on Maeterlinck and his work the present writer knows of but a single reference to this play. Before the publication of the anonymous translation now presented to English readers he could trace no other translation, or even a copy of the original French; his searches were rewarded, however, by the discovery of a German translation under the title of *Das Wunder des Heiligen Antonius*, published in Leipzig in 1904.

As the most diligent search has failed to reveal the original text, or more than a single reference to it, and as the present translation appears to be a literal rendering of the German, it seems not unlikely that we have the play at second hand.

St. Anthony of Padua (Anthony in English—why translate the name "Anthony"?), dressed as a beggar, comes to the home of a rich maiden lately deceased. Her relatives are in the house, having come to bury her and claim their share of the estate. The old drudge Virginia, a simple and pious soul, opens the door to the beggar, and believes him when he tells her who he is.

The blessed saint says that he has come to bring her former mistress, Hortensia, to life again. For a moment the drudge is alarmed at the prospect of losing the money which was to come to her, but on reflection she would rather have her mistress alive again than possess the money.

St. Anthony's halo glows with a strange and holy light, for she has made him happy. Gustavus, one of the relatives, enters and attempts to put the holy man out of the house, but strangely enough neither he nor the others who come in can budge him. The doctor is called to

help them, and finally the pastor and the sergeant of police.

As they can do nothing, St. Anthony is allowed to go to the death chamber, where he brings Hortensia to life. The moment she finds her tongue she turns to the saint and says: "What sort of a creature is that? Who has so far forgotten himself as to introduce into my apartment such a barefoot scamp? He'll ruin the carpets. Put him out at once."

The saint imposes silence upon her and turns to go. The relatives thank him and offer to make him presents—"a cigar holder, say, or a stud pin, or a meerschaum pipe,"—but he must go; he has other work to do. The play ends—a bit inconclusively, perhaps—with a charming mixture of satire and homely picturesqueness.

The play is effective—many will remember the splendid performance of it by the Washington Square Players two or three seasons ago—and whether it is by Maeterlinck or not it is well worth reading.

The five other plays in the book must not be forgotten. They are well selected and offer a comprehensive view of the poet's dramatic work. They are *Pelleas and Melisande*, *The Death of Tintagiles*, *Alladine and Palomides*, *Interior* and *The Intruder*.

A MIRACLE OF SAINT ANTHONY, AND FIVE OTHER PLAYS. BY MAURICE MAETERLINCK. Boni & Liveright. 60 cents.

A War Play of Merit Hardly Actable Now

PAWNS OF WAR, by Bosworth Crocker, is assuredly among the best of the plays yet inspired by the great war. It is written with admirable insight into character and with a just sense of the theatre.

The play would in all probability prove too painful, however, as a stage piece, at least for the immediate present. A reading will convince any one how impossible it is to write a successful play with a dispassionate mind about Belgium.

The influence of John Galsworthy is everywhere apparent in *Pawns of War*; the very title, with its implied note of the impersonal, is Galsworthian. The eminent novelist states in his foreword:

"The invasion of neutralized Belgium, according to plan, by the 'leader of civilization', in the face of an aghast world, was surely the masterpiece of cynicism—perhaps the most cynical act and the greatest piece of folly the world has ever seen." *Pawns of War*, he says, "is a play woven round this monstrous piece of cynicism and folly."

Dr. Albert Esterlinck, the burgomaster of the small Belgian town of Aershel, is held hostage by the invading Germans. His safety depends upon the behavior of the citizens of his town. Gen. von Wahlhayn of the German staff, quartered in the burgomaster's home, has forced Esterlinck to make public a proclamation declaring that if "any member of any household is found firing at" German soldiers "all members of that household shall be put to death."

The burgomaster's son, Bernard, has surreptitiously armed himself with a revolver, and jealously guards his beautiful young sister Marianne, for Gen. von Falkenhorst, billeted with Wahlhayn in the Esterlinck home, is rather too attentive to the girl. Falkenhorst, who has been drinking, becomes disagreeably insulting, and when he finally takes Marianne in his arms and passionately kisses her Bernard shoots him.

This is precisely the point where the dramatist departs from the trodden path, for we might have expected Gen. von

Wahlhayn to let loose his murderous Huns and exterminate the whole household—indeed, the proclamation had warned the citizens that death would be visited upon them for this offence—but instead the General is merely sorry. He infinitely regrets that he must do his duty—his honor demands it. And no one can deny that as a soldier, as an officer, he must visit punishment upon the Esterlinck household. Von Wahlhayn gives the order for the Esterlincks to be shot at sunrise. But in the end he breaks his own edict by sparing Esterlinck's wife and daughter.

The dramatist's intention is clear. But at present we are ready only for pictures of the wrongs of Belgium and the ferocity of soldiers, and not for a dispassionate statement of considered reasons.

PAWNS OF WAR. BY BOSWORTH CROCKER. Little, Brown & Co. \$1.25.

Ibsen Inexpensive And Also Explained

THE Modern Library continues to put forth interesting books for the poor man. It now includes two volumes of Ibsen plays, *The Master Builder*, *Pillars of Society*, and *Hedda Gabler* in one volume, and *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, and *An Enemy of the People* in another. The second volume contains only the texts, but the first is rendered doubly interesting by an introduction from the pen of H. L. Mencken.

Mr. Mencken is never so happy as when he is throwing stones at somebody, preferably a Drama Leaguer or a professor, but he handles Ibsen with kid gloves.

"Ibsen, like Wagner and Monet, has lived down his commentators and is now ready to be examined and enjoyed for what he actually was, namely, a first rate journeyman dramatist, perhaps the best that ever lived." Quite true. This is rather an interesting statement, coming as it does from a critic who is only too prone to cast all manner of aspersions on "mere technicians." To proceed: "The genuine Ibsen was anything but the Antichrist thus conjured up by imprudent partisans and terrified opponents. On the contrary, he was a man whose salient quality was precisely his distrust of and disdain for any and all such facile heresies; a highly respectable gentleman of the middle class, well barbered, ease loving and careful in mind; a very skillful practitioner of a very exacting and lucrative trade; a safe and sane exponent of order, efficiency, honesty and common sense. From end to end of his life there is no record that Ibsen ever wrote a single word or formulated a single idea that might not have been exposed in a newspaper editorial. He believed in all the things that the normal law abiding citizen of Christendom believes in, from democracy to romantic love, and from the obligations of duty to the value of virtue, and he always gave them the best of it in his plays."

Unlike some commentators, Mr. Mencken is quite readable and always diverting; in this introduction he is sound.

The short quotation from Joseph Conrad with which Mr. Mencken closes his introduction is well worth remembering, especially as it applies to Mr. Mencken's preface: "My task, which I am trying to achieve, is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you

feel—it is, before all, to make you see. That—and no more, and it is everything."

THE MASTER BUILDER, PILLARS OF SOCIETY, HEDDA GABLER. BY HENRIK IBSEN. Boni & Liveright. 60 cents.

A DOLL'S HOUSE, GHOSTS, AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE. BY HENRIK IBSEN. The Modern Library. Boni & Liveright. 60 cents.

Hauptmann's Plays

VOLUME seven of the English version of the works of Gerhart Hauptmann, edited and chiefly translated by Dr. Ludwig Lewisohn, has just appeared. This important undertaking, the rendering into English of the entire work of one of the great dramatists of the present day, has been carried out with a commendable care and taste both on the part of editor and publisher.

This latest volume contains two fragments, very little known even to ardent students of Hauptmann's work, *Helios* and *Pastoral*. The drama *Elga*, staged here a year or so ago in English, and a five act verse play, *The Bow of Odysseus*, as well as the *Commemoration Masque*, complete the list of contents.

The *Masque*, here presented for the first time in English, has a history. It was written in 1913 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Germany's liberation from the Napoleonic yoke. Hauptmann was commissioned to write the *Masque*, but his rendering of history and his point of view toward many burning questions did not find favor in the eyes of the authorities.

There was turmoil and a tempest that would fill a considerable teapot. Hauptmann's attitude toward militarism was not considered either in good taste or safe as a guide to public opinion.

The *Masque* has been wonderfully well translated by Prof. Bayard Quincy Morgan. The other plays in this volume have all been put into English by Dr. Lewisohn. Hauptmann's treatment of the Odysseus story is novel. In the two fragments of dramas that end the volume the poet seems to be seeking a justification of his desertion of the realistic drama for the field of romance.

GERHART HAUPTMANN. Dramatic Works. Vol. VII. B. W. Huebner. \$1.50.

For Amateur Actors.

A MATEUR ENTERTAINMENTS is a brief and more or less practical guide for producers of amateur plays, operas, musicales and "shows." In the space of 100 pages the author has a good deal to say about the ways and means of staging plays which will undoubtedly help the inexperienced school teacher. Were it not that this country had already contributed at least three books during the last two years, each of which is far superior to the one in question, *Amateur Entertainments* might well be recommended as a practical and somewhat obsolete guide. It seems rather strange that a publishing house which has recently brought out *Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs* should consent to take over an inferior English product attempting to cover the same field.

AMATEUR ENTERTAINMENTS. BY CRANSTON METCALF. E. P. Dutton & Company. 75 cents.

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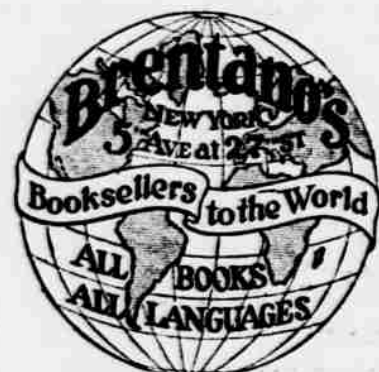
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